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## Reviews

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# the Essential

THE WB NETWORK

review by | TIM PALUCH



No, I'm not kidding. This isn't a joke. Seriously, I'd appreciate it if — c'mon, now — stop laughing. I'm telling you, the WB network is good, solid programming. Quality entertainment.

And I'll tell you why — it's because nary a Wayans is anywhere to be found.

The WB is no longer just an entertainment graveyard, where third-rate actors, fourth-rate comedians and fifth-rate musicians go to die, slain by the two-headed beast that is public acceptance and the Nielsen Ratings.

Oh, these people still have shows on the WB, and they are truly terrible, terrible wastes of half-hours — how else do you explain *Reba*?

But the network brass wised up and accepted that the next *Seinfeld* or *Friends* — hell, even the next *Becker* — isn't coming from the writers that brought you *The Parent 'Hood* and *Nick Freno: Licensed Teacher*.

These 30-minute laugh tracks are joined in the WB's prime time lineup by a few solid, thought-provoking and downright entertaining dramas.

At the top of this list is *Smallville*, a dark and introspective glance into the life of an adolescent Clark Kent. He's an awkward teen, tripping his way from boyhood to adulthood — girls, high school, girls, girls — while also trying to come to grips with his unsettling superpowers.

*Birds of Prey* isn't as intelligent or smart as *Smallville*, but it's equally entertaining. Continuing the trend of putting a contemporary twist on classic comics, the show answers those four questions every Batman fan has asked.

*Did Batman and Catwoman get it on?*

*If Batman and Catwoman did indeed get it on, would their daughter, too, fight crime?*

*Would said daughter be really, really hot? Would she wear tight, revealing clothing, especially during fight scenes?*

Batman has left New Gotham, leaving three gorgeous woman with keen technical wizardry, witty comments and names like "Oracle," "Huntress" and "Dinah" to watch over the city.

Throw *Everwood*, *Do Over*, *Angel* and *Gilmore Girls* onto the list. All are unique, watchable hours of television, something not often said about other networks.

Don't throw *7th Heaven* or *Dawson's Creek* anywhere near the list. In fact, put them on a new list. Now burn that list. And make sure none of the ashes fall anywhere near that other list.

*7th Heaven* — about a minister, his wife and their seven children — is a sterile and pure examination of drug use, violence in school, dating, teen pregnancy. All through the watchful eyes of Rev. Camden, who isn't even boning one of little Lucy's high school friends after Bible class. Where's the drama, WB?

*Dawson's Creek* is equally unwatchable. Never mind the fact that the teenage characters in the show are actually somewhere in their mid-40s in real life — I think James Van Der Beek was Dustin Hoffman's friend in *The Graduate* — the show also misrepresents teen angst. Someone tell Pacey when we were 18 we weren't depressed because we couldn't decide which hot girl we wanted more. We couldn't get any. From anyone.

Don't abandon the WB for its checkered past. No one's telling you to watch *Reba*. But the WB's got Katie Holmes. And she's in commercials on the network, too. That alone makes this network a must-see. It just took me 500 words to get to that. **e**



## Music Review

### AMERICAN IV: THE MAN COMES AROUND JOHNNY CASH

review by | BETHANY KOHOUTEK

Johnny Cash is the only musician alive who can sing a cover better than the original artist. He's proved it again with his latest album, *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, a combination of genre-bending cover tunes and a handful of originals that cement his standing as one of the greatest songwriters in history.

The 70-year-old Cash reinterprets everything from Nine Inch Nails' *Hurt* to The Beatles' *In My Time* to Depeche Mode's *Personal Jesus*, with help from the likes of Fiona Apple, Nick Cave and Smokey Hormel. True to form, he imbues each cover with a darkness and profundity that only the Man in Black can summon.

Yet it's the originals that stand out. The title tune contains a mix of biblical imagery and foreshadowings of death encased in a hook that simultaneously hits you in the gut and stirs your heart.

Cash's voice trembles a bit more than it used to. The photos within the liner notes reveal a white-haired, bespectacled old man. Yet somehow he will always be the rogue who flipped mainstream Nashville the bird and recorded his best album inside the walls of Folsom Prison — the Man in Black.

## Book Review

### HOW TO BE ALONE JONATHAN FRANZEN

review by | PAUL KIX

Last year, Jonathan Franzen's third novel *The Corrections* won the National Book Award and was selected for Oprah's Book Club. Franzen didn't like the "corporate logo" on his "high minded literary art" and soon Oprah uninvited him from her show. In *How to be Alone*, the first collection of Franzen's essays, he talks about *le' affaire* Oprah, but, disappointedly, writes nothing of Fame and Money and how the two have changed him. He does include "My Father's Brain" in the book, which won the award for best magazine essay after it appeared in *The New Yorker*, but inappropriately — because Franzen really is a good writer — the rest of the reportage in the collection fails. However, *How to be Alone*, when it isn't Franzen as Reporter, succeeds. Just not as much as his next novel will.

## Movie Review

### HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

review by | SARA TENNESSEN

Hordes of spiders. Mysterious creatures crawling through ancient plumbing. Iowa State dorms or the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry?

The parallels between Harry Potter's magical boarding-school adventures and the less-than-magical happenings here in Ames could be one of the reasons *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is so appealing to college students.

It's a fantasy about how cool life would be if only we had magical powers, a homicidal archnemeses and understanding administrators. It's a fantasy you should see, if only for the glorious moment that occurs after Harry soundly defeats a certain monster: finals are canceled "as a reward."

We need more monsters around here.

## Best Movie ... You've Never Heard Of

### BOONDOCK SAINTS

review by | ANDY TU

Boston Catholics. Vigilante brothers. Killing spree. Damn. Sounds like a good flick. Add the ugliest man in Hollywood, Willem Dafoe, into the mix, and it's great. *Boondock Saints* is a story of two brothers who take the law into their own hands to avenge the death of their mother. The community is torn between condemning the brothers' murderous acts or praising them for cleaning the scum from Boston's streets. Also torn is the investigator (played by Dafoe) who must ask himself the same question.

The action and investigation scenes are arranged in a nonlinear format that keeps the viewer guessing. Cameo appearances by porn star Ron Jeremy and Billy Connolly spice things up like Emeril after a commercial break. Check it out for a dose of intelligent adrenaline.